DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF EDUCATION
WASHINGTON, D. C.

Geographic News Bulletin

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ENTRANCE TO THE MOSQUE OF SANCTA SOPHIA, CONSTANTINOPLE

Built by the Emperor Justinian to be the most wonderful and costly Christian church in the world. Sancta Sophia is now one of the most revered of Mohammedan mosques.

(Week of April 4, 1921)

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Central America: A Romance of Bananas and Coffee.

WHEN the American small boy eats his daily quota of bananas, and when his father and mother sip their breakfast, luncheon, or dinner coffee, they are making important contributions to the prosperity of fellow Americans, of whom they know very little—the residents of the five Central American republics which have lately reached a preliminary decision for the formation of a sort of "United States of Central America."

Central America illustrates strikingly the effects of geographic factors on a region's development. All the five republics lie on the relatively narrow isthmus between the slender ribbon of Panama on the south and Mexico on the north. The Spanish settlements made soon after the discovery of America were all on the Pacific side of the isthmus, for the most part on the plateaus and mountain slopes and in the mountain valleys of that region, which temper an otherwise tropical climate. Practically the entire Atlantic side of the isthmus was a low plain, covered with a dense tropical jungle. This acted as a great "Chinese Wall," erected by nature, which discouraged or actually cut off intercourse with the Atlantic coast and turned the faces of all the countries toward the Pacific.

Isolated Both by Nature and Man

The isolation started by nature was continued by the colonial policy of the Spaniards, who for three hundred years permitted the Central American settlers to trade only with the mother country and greatly restricted even that commerce. At the time of the throwing off of the Spanish yoke in 1821, the Central American settlements were as effectually cut off from the United States as if they had been many thousands of miles away instead of being only across the Caribbean Sea.

With the settlement of the Pacific coast of the United States, the building of the Panama Railroad, and later the construction of a trans-Mexican railway, the Panama Canal, and railways across Guatemala and Costa Rica, Central America has become easily accessible.

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LOADING BANANAS: COSTA RICA

The banana is one of the greatest food producers per acre in the world. We imported more than $19,000,000 worth in 1920. Before the war the banana trade engaged more ships flying the American flag than any other business having a foreign end.

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Baku: Oil City of the Caspian.

THE recent outbreak of revolts in Russia against the Bolshevik régime raises among other interesting questions that of whether Baku, the great oil city of Asia, now surrounded by Bolshevik governments, will be once more thrown open to world commerce. This city, in the heart of one of the world's greatest petroleum fields, has been practically bottled up since the fall of the Russian Empire.

The city of Baku, built in the form of an amphitheater on the south side of the Apsheron peninsula, which juts far out into the Caspian Sea, is the Tampico of the Slav Empire. Two vast oil fields, containing more than 2,700 wells, make it the chief oil center of Europe. During the World War, had the Central powers succeeded in reaching it before the British forces occupied it, the blow would have been even more serious to the Allied cause than was the seizure of the Rumanian oil fields by the German army of occupation.

A City Below Sea Level

According to a census the year before the outbreak of the war, Baku was a city about the present size of Providence, R. I.; Columbus, Ohio, or Louisville, Ky. It was the chief city of the Russian province of the same name, but in recent years the province has formed a government of its own under the name of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Baku is situated in the midst of an unattractive, treeless plain which stretches along the western shores of the Caspian. The Caspian is 84 feet below sea-level, and Baku rises only 30 feet above the great inland sea, so that it is more than 50 feet below the ocean level.

Many centuries ago the Persian fire-worshippers discovered that the natural gases issuing from fissures in the rocks near Baku would burn, and there may be seen, a few miles from the city, the remains of one of their ancient temples. The city itself was in existence as early as the sixth century. It did not become a Russian possession until a little more than a hundred years ago.

The upper part of the city, corresponding to the back rows of an amphitheater, is the picturesque Tatar quarter, with its many narrow lanes and oriental bazaars. A fifteenth century palace of the Khans is in a very dilapidated condition, and has been used for many years by the Russians as a military magazine. The most characteristic structure in the town is the massive Kis Kale, or Maidens' Tower, which rises to a height of 147 feet and which is now used as a lighthouse. It dates from the Byzantine period.

Greatest Russian Oil Field

Four-fifths of all the oil produced in the Russian Empire came from the Baku fields. The high-water mark of production was reached in 1902,

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Shortly before the construction of the Panama Railroad, coffee was introduced into Central America from the West Indies and was found to grow to perfection in the lava soil on the slopes of the volcanic mountains along the Pacific coast of most of the region. Coffee soon became an export of prime importance and has brought much money into Central America.

Where the Banana Comes In

The remainder of Central America's horticultural romance has as its motif the banana. In order that the great American hunger for that slender golden fruit might be appeased, large fruit growing and distributing corporations from the United States acquired extensive tracts of land in the Atlantic plain, reclaimed it from the jungle, and planted great banana groves which produce millions of bunches of bananas yearly.

The by-products of this development have been as valuable to Central America as the money that has flowed directly to laborers and to the government. Important cities have sprung up along the Atlantic coast, railroads have been built, and what is probably most important of all, lines of fast, well-equipped steamers, carrying both passengers and freight, have been established between the Atlantic ports and those of the United States. In effect the banana has shifted Central America thousands of miles closer to the outside world.

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In Turkey Reform Springs Eternal.

TURKEY bids fair to "come back," in a limited sense at least, as a result of the proposed revision of the Sèvres Treaty that dismembered the Ottoman Empire after the World War. It will be a changed Turkey, to be sure, but change is not new in the country that inherited Mohammed's religious empire. Paradoxically, Turkey, though it has a tradition of national inertia, also is a land of kaleidoscopic reform, and may be said to react to reforms more discriminatingly than any other country in or out of Christendom.

Turkey Went Dry Six Centuries Ago

Turkey began its existence on a foundation of reforms, the empire inheriting the comprehensive reshaping of the religious and social world instituted by Mohammed. It "went dry" just 620 years before the United States, for its "eighteenth amendment" was not an amendment at all, but a part, so to speak, of the organic act when the Empire came into existence in 1299.

Even the jokes of coffee and tobacco prohibition that have gone the rounds of the American vaudeville stage came near being a reality in Turkey. Mohammedan scholars fulminated against the steaming cup; and one Sultan went so far as to prohibit the use of tobacco. But the populace refused to have the Prophet's covenants changed, and the ban was raised.

Though the reported passing of the fez is looked upon as a reform which to western eyes would remove something as distinctively Turkish as the star and crescent, the introduction of the gaudy skull cap was itself a reform effected less than a hundred years ago. To the Turkish Tories of those days the fez traveled in company sufficiently disreputable to damn it utterly. It was introduced forcibly into the army by the Sultan Mahmoud II in the early part of the nineteenth century along with tight European trousers and frock coats. These and such other reforms as the establishment of a newspaper earned for Mahmoud the title of "Infidel Sultan."

The Fez an Essential to Prayer

The fez and turban types of head coverings have a definite reason for existence in Turkey, and it is to be doubted that they will be discarded entirely, especially for the brimmed hats and visored caps of Europeans. Mohammedan rules and customs call for covered heads at prayer; and they also require that at one stage of prayer the votary shall touch his nose and forehead to the ground, a feat that is impossible if he wears a hat with a protruding brim."

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when the output of the district was nearly ten million tons of crude petroleum. In 1905, however, there was a disastrous fire which considerably curtailed production for a time. The latest authentic figures on production are those for 1915, when a little more than seven million tons was produced. Much of the output of the wells, which vary in depth from 500 to 2,000 feet, was transported by pipe line to Batum on the Black Sea, but Baku is also connected by rail with this seaport as well as with Rostov-on-the-Don. Batum lies 560 miles to the west, across the present republic of Georgia, by way of Tiflis, and Rostov-on-the-Don is 818 miles to the northwest, in old Russia.

In addition to its oil interest, Baku had drydocks, flour mills, sulphuric acid works and tobacco factories. It was the chief entrepôt for raw cotton, silk, fruits, dried fish, wines and rice produced in Persia and the Transcaucasus territory.

The town derives its name from the squalls (badkube) which are frequently very violent on this part of the Caspian coast.

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The Crimea: Battleground and Playground.

THE Crimea was the scene of one of the latest anti-Bolshevik military efforts from outside Russia to win back a part of that old empire.

The Crimean peninsula in which this encounter took place is a land which has aspects known to every school child. It is the land of the Cimmerians about whom Homer sang in the "Odyssey" and from whom the peninsula takes its name; the land of the Crimean War, the siege of Sevastopol, and the "Charge of the Light Brigade"; the land in which Florence Nightingale first caused efficient, ordered mercy to have a part in war.

The Crimea is known as "The Little Paradise" to the Tatars, last of the many races to overrun the peninsula before the land fell under the sway of the Muscovite. A traveler journeying from the north is likely to accept this appellation, if at all, with a strong mental reservation as he crosses the almost desert-like plains of northern Crimea; but once over the mountains that rim the southern shore he will approve the description with enthusiasm. There Nature has made a wonderful garden spot, the Riviera of Russia, a combination of sea, mountains and riotous verdure that really vied with its famed Italian counterpart in the days when Czarhood was in flower.

Land of the Czars' Pleasure Domes

Though a part of what has come to be looked upon as "cold Russia," the southern shore of the Crimea brought to the old empire a touch of the tropics. On the mountain slopes and in the sheltered valleys grow grapes, figs, olives and all the tender fruits; magnolias, bays, and myrtles; and a profusion of wild flowers and grasses. That the delights of its mild climate were discovered early is testified by the ruins of Greek, Byzantine, and Italian architecture which are to be found among the mosques of the later Tatars, the palaces of the Russian imperial family and nobility, and the magnificent modern hotels of the pleasure towns to which the prosperous classes of Russia flocked before the World War. Jalta, in those carefree days, was Russia's Nice, Newport, and Miami rolled into one; its cafe and casino life was as hectic, gay, and expensive as that to be found in any of the world's pre-war playgrounds.

The Crimea is a peninsula that barely escaped being an island. It hangs from the mainland of South Russia down into the Black Sea, like a gigantic watch fob shaped like a flounder. It is attached by the narrow ribbon of the Isthmus of Perekop, a strip of land only three-quarters of a mile wide and only a few feet above sea level. On one side is the Black Sea and on the other the stagnant, shallow, malodorous waters of the Sivatch, or Putrid Sea, a lagoon of the Sea of Azof.

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FEZES AND TURBANS EVERYWHERE. AND NOT A SINGLE HAT.

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Tahiti: Pacific Island Garden Spot.

WITH the shifting of ownership that has taken place among the Islands of the Pacific and the growing importance of that great body of water in international affairs, the holdings of the various nations in the Pacific are taking on new value. One of the most important of the French Pacific possessions is Tahiti, or the Society Islands, with steamship connection to San Francisco and New Zealand. They are described in the following communication to the National Geographic Society from H. W. Smith:

"Like the Samoans, the Society Islands are of volcanic origin, rising from the low bed of the ocean, which has depths near the islands of 9,000 to 12,000 feet, while the highest peak, in the center of the Island of Tahiti, reaches an altitude of 7,300 feet. On a clear morning the view as the ship approaches the harbor of Papeete is most beautiful, showing deep valleys penetrating from the coast to the mountain peaks of the interior.

"Near Papeete the beautiful Fatauua Valley may be visited in an afternoon. For a good part of the way a carriage road leads up the valley, offering changing vistas.

Delicacies Grow "Wild"

"Why, indeed, should the Tahitian toil? There are great leaves of the wild 'taro' growing by the roadside; the young leaves are delicious boiled, and the curious stranger will find many other new delicacies of the table—the alligator-pear, the baked papya, the Mantis crab, the raw fish, as good as the best oyster, served with Tahitian sauce, and, on rare occasions, a salad made from the heart of the coconut tree.

"In Tahiti, as well as in most of the South Sea Islands, great numbers of coconuts are grown. The meat, after being dried into copra, is shipped in large quantities to Europe. We were much interested in the different methods of gathering the nuts in various islands. In Tahiti the natives climb the trees with the help of a strip of green, fibrous bark torn off the stem of a hibiscus tree. After knotting the two ends together, the climber slips his feet half through the circle, and, standing with legs apart, so as to stretch the thong tight, ascends the tree in a series of leaps, with a foot on each side of the trunk. A practiced climber will thus mount trees of a very considerable height with a celerity and ease which do not suggest the long practice actually required. On making a trial myself I found it difficult to climb even so much as a foot from the ground.

"In its fresh, green state the coconut provides a most refreshing drink, but as it grows older the 'milk' hardens and forms the white inner rind with which we are all familiar. When dried this is the celebrated copra and is commercially put to many different uses. In Tahiti it is used for sauces and for coconut oil. One sauce, which was served with fish at a very enjoyable picnic, although compounded of scraped nut and sea-water, was palatable."

This is the only unbroken natural land connection between the mainland and the Crimea, but a few miles to the east a narrow part of the Putrid Sea has been bridged by the railroad which enters the peninsula. Still farther eastward a peculiar natural formation, a mere thread-like causeway of sand known as the Tongue of Arabat, stretches for more than 50 miles from the mainland to the base of the "flounder's tail" that forms the easternmost extension of the Crimea. A canal has been cut through this spit of sand near its northern end to connect the waters of the Sea of Azov and those of the Putrid Sea. The intrenching and mining of these three narrow land entrances to the Crimea are relatively simple matters from the point of view of military engineering.

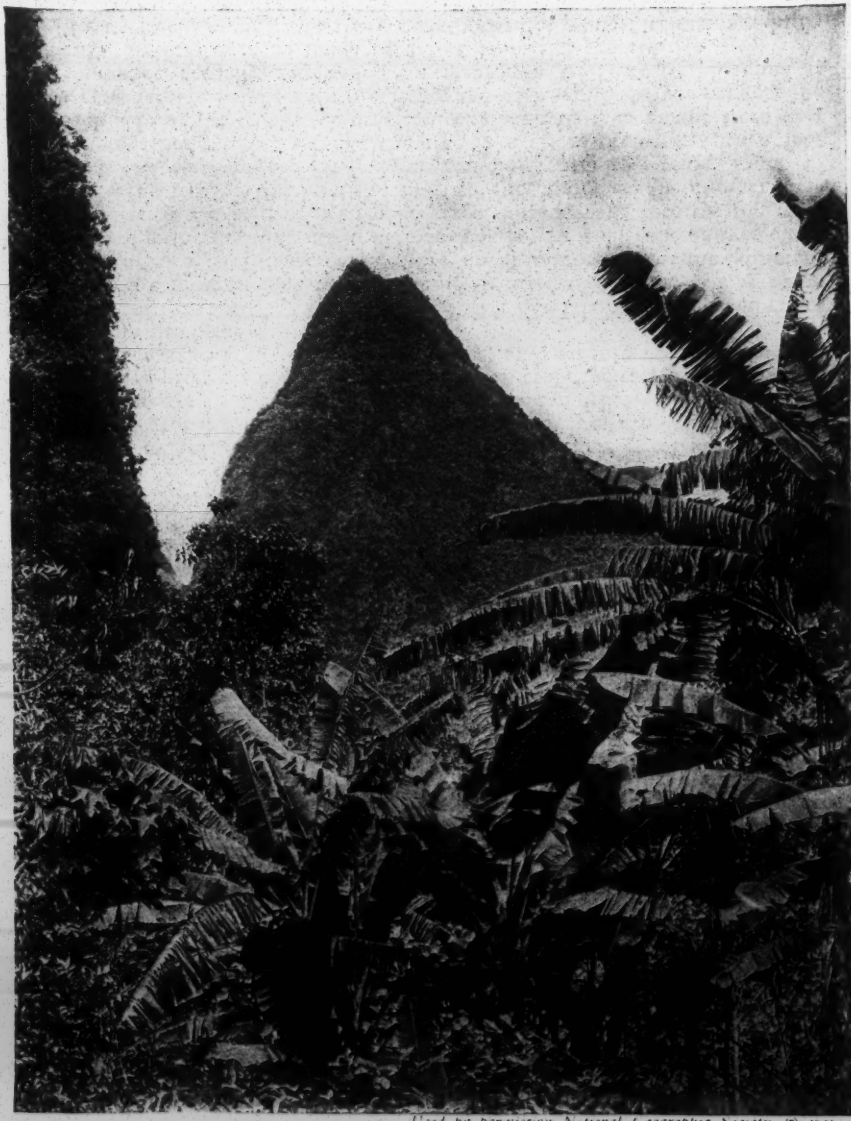
The greatest width of the Crimea north and south is 115 miles, and its greatest length from "head" to "tail" is 225 miles. It contains about 9,700 square miles, and is thus approximately the size of the State of Vermont or the Island of Sicily. Before the World War its population was about 2,000,000.

City of Tatars Gives Atmosphere of Asia

The Cimmerians, Celts and close cousins of the Welsh, were the first people known to be in possession of the Crimea, at the early dawn of Greek history. They were driven out by the Scythians. Coast communities were established by the Greeks at a later date. The Huns overran the Crimea when they surged into Europe. It was colonized by Byzantine Greeks, Venetians and Genoese. The Tatars later took control and set up a Mohammedan state under a line of Khans. Bakhchisaral, their capital, remains little changed today, a slice of Asia in Europe. The dominant feature of the old Tatar city is the palace of Khans, which in many ways is like the Alhambra of Granada.

The Crimea was conquered by Catharine the Great of Russia in 1771 and remained a part of the Russian Empire until that political entity's collapse in 1917. The bulk of the population remains Tatar, though there is an admixture of both Greek and Italian blood in the nominally Tatar people.

Sevastopol, on the west coast of the Crimea, was a great military post in the days of the old Russian régime, and it was as well the home port of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. From there, according to cherished imperial dreams, was to go forth on the Russian counterpart of "Der Tag" the forces that would wrest the Bosphorus and Dardanelles from the Turk, and place the cross of St. George over Constantinople and the Cross of Christ over Sancta Sophia.



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VIEW IN THE FATAUUA VALLEY, TAHITI.